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# Tough times at adult school

*Budget cuts mean hard decisions for facility vital to Stockton-area residents*

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Claudia Ruelas works on a computer during a medical office class Thursday at the Stockton School for Adults.

Clifford Oto/The Record

By **Roger Phillips**

Record Staff Writer  
February 08, 2010 12:00 AM

STOCKTON - Laid off from her job as an office assistant with the San Joaquin Regional Transit District in 2008, Claudia Ruelas was at a crossroads. She wanted to get a new and better job but lacked a high school diploma and the skills that would enable her to increase her opportunities.

So Ruelas, now 39, went back to school. She is learning the computer programs she needs to work in the front office of a medical facility, plans to pursue her General Equivalency Diploma, and hopes eventually to become a nurse.

"I want to get more skills," said Ruelas, a native of Mexico who has been in the United States for 22 years. "I want to work in hospitals or clinics."

Five days a week for three hours in the morning, Ruelas attends school in the stately old building at the southern edge of the Miracle Mile. Daily, about 1,700 students, most of them adults, pass through the doors of the Stockton School For Adults, at Pacific Avenue and Harding Way.

They are there to learn to read, to learn to speak English, to improve their computer skills so they can get a better job, to finish their high school diplomas, to get GEDs. There also are some high school students who attend after their regular school day to make up credits so they can graduate.

"(This school) is the greatest thing that ever happened," said 50-year-old Sharee Hernandez, a former waitress who is taking a math class while battling an illness that in recent years has affected her memory. "I'm staying here until I get what I need to pursue a better career. The community needs this school."

The school is not going anywhere. But in these economically challenged times, funding has been reduced. The school's core services remain intact, but it will not offer a summer session this year and has reduced the number of weeks and hours for its night programs, Principal Carol Hirota said.

State funding has decreased from \$4.1 million in 2007-08 to \$3.3 million this year. The school's fiscal reserves are being used to make up for some of the cuts. The school also receives funding from the federal government.

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